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ABSTRACT

Among the recent changes to existing Pennsylvania state education regulations was the change from Carnegie units, or time spent in the classroom, as a requirement for graduation to mastery of student learning outcomes as a requirement for graduation. Once the changes became law, school districts became responsible for designing outcomes that fit their district profiles but that were in accord with the outcomes designed by the state. Districts were grouped into three phases for implementation, with the phase-one districts required to submit strategic plans by September 30, 1994. This paper documents the strategic planning in process for one phase-one school district. It provides a snapshot of some of the issues based on observation and interviews with the strategic planning coordinator, two parent representatives, and external university-based planners. Political issues, a lack of comfort with the university-based planning team, overall community support, inadequacies in existing facilities, and finances are issues with which the planners must struggle. (Contains 1 reference.) (SLD)

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Implementation of Strategic Planning: Teaching and Learning Issues in a State Policy Mandate

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Implementation of Strategic Planning:
Teaching and Learning Issues in a State Policy Mandate

In June of 1993, the State of Pennsylvania passed into law new regulations and changes to their existing state education regulations. These new additions effected assessment, curriculum, and vocational education. The major change that caught the attention of the country was the change from Carnegie Units, or time spent in the classroom, as a requirement for graduation to mastery of student learning outcomes as a requirement for graduation. Prior to the passage, there had been a year-long debate in the state steeped in controversy over the student learning outcomes, and, also, how they were to be measured. Many interest groups thought that the initial outcomes were too affective in nature, and the outcomes, as stated, would create difficulties when they were to be measured. Eventually, the state came up with fifty-three outcomes that created less controversy and were acceptable to most of the critics.

Once the additions and changes became law in June 1993, school districts were charged with designing outcomes that fit their district's profile, but were in accordance with the spirit of the fifty-three designed by the state. In section 5.202 of the regulations, the wording read: "Achieving the outcomes shall not require students to hold or express particular attitudes, values or beliefs." In addition, the regulations further stated that "A school district's curriculum shall be designed to provide all students with focused learning opportunities needed to attain these outcomes." To ensure state monitoring of this, section 5.203 of the new regulations stated that "Every school district shall develop and submit a strategic plan to the Department for approval once every 6 years and a mid-point revision of the plan once every 3 years according to an implementation schedule by the Department..." Thus the State Department of Education began implementation requirements in a three phase process. The 500 school districts in Pennsylvania were grouped into three phases for implementation. The first phase districts were to have their strategic plan into the State Department of Education by September 30, 1994.

This paper is a documentation summary of a phase one district's strategic planning process-in-progress. It is a snapshot of some of the issues the actors struggled with as they attempted to implement the strategic planning mandate of the policy. I was a participant observer at two of the district's strategic planning meetings in November and December of 1993, and later conducted three interviews of actors involved in the process. The paper centers around five observation questions and seven interview questions. In addition, five "elephants" were found sitting in their midst and these "elephants" were defined in light of

cultural and social impacts influencing the strategic planning implementation process at the time. Finally, a formative summary is given picturing where the district was by December of 1993.

OBSERVATIONS

The district involved in the evaluation was in a low socio-economic community that was once a hub of the steel mill industry bordering a major urban area of western Pennsylvania. Over a fifteen year period, the community had slowly declined from a comfortable working middle-class community driven by the steel mill environment to a struggling, unemployed, lower-class community. There were still community members who believed that the mill would open once again, however, most of the mills have been torn down. The dream of re-opening was a fantasy that some still held onto. Consequently, the dream and the life in the past, often influenced the decisions around community affairs, particularly those influencing the school district.

There was once a thriving community interest in the schools, a great deal of money and community support for the schools, and an overall pride in the academic life of the children in the community. At that time, the children would usually graduate from high school and go to work in the mills. The life of the community centered around the mills. The mills dictated the vacation time of the families, financial stability, and social life of the families in the community. Overall, they generally took care of the welfare of the families, and people felt secure and comfortable. Since the closing of the mills, there has been little community interest in the schools, little money to support them, and apathy towards the academic lives of the children except in the athletic achievements of the school teams that often have championship teams. If children graduate from high school at all, they usually move away from the area, or remain in the community at minimum-waged jobs, if they have jobs at all. Many of the youth are beginning to join gangs. Life now centers around survival rather than security and comfort.

Due to economic hardship in the community, the school administration has been forced to close several school buildings in the last two years and many teachers and administrators have been laid off. In addition, several major street gangs from the urban center have taken up headquarters in the vacant buildings within the community causing alarm to the adults and gravitating interest from the youth in the community.

The Superintendent had been working with an external, university-based planning team to help direct the long-ranged planning ideas of the district for a few years. However, now that strategic planning was a mandate, he and the School Board maintained this planning team to help with the specifics of strategic

planning. The Superintendent and Board received criticism for this from the teachers' union because union members had been trained by the state teachers' association to facilitate strategic planning, and the union felt that the task should be done by an internal team and not an external team that would cost money. The Superintendent and Board argued that this team had already been contracted and worked with the district for at least three years, and the pay was coming from a special grant that the state provided for long-ranged planning. Why change the planners when there was now a switch to strategic planning and they had one year to get this plan organized and on the desk in the State Department of Education? They further argued that these planners already knew the district, administrators, and teachers, and were familiar with the community.

The consequence of this choice to retain the external planners was that the union leadership was unwilling to participate in the planning process, and this influenced many teachers to support the union leadership and boycott joining themselves. The mandate, however, called for active participation by teachers and that "teacher representatives shall be chosen by the teachers..". In December, this was causing some major concerns for the administration because they knew that somewhere down the road the teachers had to get involved especially in the mandated areas that affected curriculum and instruction. Two teachers had shown interest in participating, but no others were stepping forward at that time.

In the Fall of 1993, the Steering Committee was in the early stages of developing belief statements that supported the mission statement developed in February. In November and December of 1993, I observed two Strategic Planning Steering Committee meetings. The Steering Committee consisted of thirty-two members, but each meeting drew a membership of only 33%.

A small steering committee had formed in the winter of 1992 prior to the regulations becoming law because the administration felt that they wanted to get a start on what they knew would be an eventuality, and some of the members had been involved with long-ranged planning so it was a comfortable transition. This small steering committee had drafted a mission statement for the district by February 1993. The belief statements were later to be designed to enrich the mission statement, and this is what was being worked on by November and December of 1993. It was the feeling of the members of the Steering Committee that from the mission statement and the belief statements would come the student learning outcomes. The mission statement and the belief statements would drive the outcomes which would be addressed and developed by the Steering Committee and a Technical Committee (a sub-committee of the Steering Committee) at a later

date.

I developed five observation questions to be addressed as I attended the meetings. The questions were formulated around issues that were on the table in the state debate around implementation of the new regulations namely themes that addressed: communication, assessment of student learning outcomes, major actors in the reform effort, methods of strategic planning, and interpretation of the mandate.

The following are the comprised answers to the observation questions:

1. What activities were in place to communicate changes to the community-at-large namely parents, teachers, and businesses?

The district had a Strategic Planning Steering Committee that had been organized by the Winter of 1992 with members being added during the Spring and Fall of 1993. Members were either invited to belong or they responded to a community notice in the local paper for participants. According to documents, the committee was comprised of representatives from the school board, administration, teachers, parents, other school employees (but I did not know what "other" meant because there was no one at any of the meetings representing an "other"), and business and community representatives including the NAACP. In addition, the Mayor (who is related to one of the central office administrators) was also on the committee. In December, these representatives said they were communicating with their constituents by word-of-mouth.

The Steering Committee expected the strategic plan to be completed by June 1994 at which time the school board would put the plan on public display somewhere in town, maybe the library, for thirty days. The plan would then be submitted to the Department of Education in Harrisburg by September 30, 1994.

The major responsibility to keep the community informed of the process as it continued would rest with the "Organization/Personnel" subcommittee of the Technical Committee once that committee got organized. In addition, the district held some Saturday meetings opened to the community, and these meetings were organized by the Business Manager of the district. Furthermore, the NAACP representative said that there were Saturday meetings of their organization held and included students from this district as well as two surrounding districts. The theme of the NAACP-organized meetings centered around possible changes in school districts due to the new regulations and how those might affect the African-American students.

2. What means of assessment were they planning to use to measure student learning outcomes?

Financial issues seemed to be plaguing their decision on this. The committee members were confident that the outcomes they would eventually see developed in the district would be met, but that the state should provide funding to develop measurement instruments. The members of the committee felt there would be a financial equity issue centered around the choice of assessment in various districts, and some districts, like themselves, had no money. The wealthier communities would have a major advantage over them in choosing assessment instruments.

Members of the committee felt that when the "Assessment" subcommittee got up and running that choosing an instrument would be a major task. The members did not know, at this time, if they would choose a standardized test or school-based assessment. Whatever the decision, everyone agreed that paper and pencil tasks would be less important.

Some committee members felt that the teachers that really knew what it meant to assess the whole child were kindergarten teachers who were trained to look at the children from a developmental point of view. Some members pondered out loud: "Wasn't this what these outcomes were all about?"

3. Who played the major role in this reform effort e.g. superintendent, school committee, teams of planners that include teachers and parents?

There were three key actors: The Superintendent, the Business Manager, and the internal Strategic Planning Coordinator (who was also a school principal). It appeared that the planning meeting agendas, and any information distribution or retrieval centered around the Strategic Planning Coordinator. At the first meeting, the Business Manager had much to say and seemed to play a key role but he was not at the second meeting. The Superintendent was an active participant in the process though he did not maintain a leadership role in the strategic planning meeting, yet he did intercede at times to bring closure to discussions or add informative input. The presence of these three individuals was strongly felt at the meetings.

The university-based strategic planning team played a key role in keeping the committee on task and holding it responsible for writing clear, brief, belief statements. They would take these at the end of the November meeting and prepare a document for the December meeting. At the December meeting, they were

responsible for getting the committee into work-groups to finalize the belief statements.

4. What methods were being used for strategic planning and what were the committee considering as areas that needed "planning"?

The Steering Committee was engaged in small group brainstorming sessions to work on the belief statements. They hoped to see the student learning outcomes flow from these when the Technical Committee met in the future to design the outcomes. Back in February 1993, the initial members of the Steering Committee had developed the mission statement and had developed a very rough draft of belief statements. However, in the Fall of 1993, the newly expanded Steering Committee, developed the enriched belief statements which included the areas of curriculum, resources, athletics, community/parental involvement, technology, facilities, students, staff development, and educational programs.

The Technical Committee was not developed by December 1993 but would eventually include subcommittees that would address the following: school identity; planned courses; assessment; and organization/personnel. The Steering Committee felt that it had issues for these subcommittees to consider once the subcommittees got organized, and there would have to be negotiations on the process that these subcommittees used to make decisions. Some of the issues being considered were: They will need to address organizational issues; they will have to determine how the outcome, "wellness and fitness," will be affected by athletics; they will have to determine what it means to have parents as part of the organization; they will have to ask themselves: "How do you think differently in a technological society?"; they will have to ask themselves: "How does the community become part?" At the time, the Steering Committee agreed that everyone in the community was a student and the community was made up of life long learners. This thought, they felt, should drive many of the decisions to be made in the future.

5. How were they, the members of the Steering Committee, interpreting the reform mandate for strategic planning?

They felt that the mission and belief statements were the main focus that would drive their student learning outcomes. They held onto the notion that local control was a key factor in developing plans for the revisions in the regulations. They believed that their Steering Committee represented the teams responsible

for creating the student learning outcomes and developing the standards for their students to meet. Their Technical Committee and the subcommittees of that would be responsible for developing the outcomes and the standards.

They were unsure what the state meant by the language mandate that read:

> All students converse, at a minimum level of "Intermediate Low," as defined in the oral proficiency guidelines developed by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages, in at least one language other than English, including the native language if other than English, under 5.215 (c) (relating to languages).

Since French and Spanish were the basic languages taught in most high schools, they wondered if it was not time to change to Japanese, Arabic, and Russian since they saw these as the important languages of the future, and, yet, what did "Intermediate Low" mean?

They were trying to determine in December how they would handle the different standards now that they were changing from a time-based system to a performance-based system. They were wondering what "mastery" actually meant and how would it be measured?

Since they were in phase one, they had to have the strategic plan into the State Department of Education by September 30, 1994. They understood, at that time, that they would have to meet face-to-face with a review panel to defend their plan. The new plan would effect the incoming ninth graders in the 1995-96 school year. In response to critics, they had sorted out among themselves that they would not let anyone say that this was a "bazaar effort" because there were many districts across the nation that were doing the same thing.

INTERVIEWS

The three interviews included one with the Strategic Planning Coordinator, a joint interview with the parent representative who also was the PTA representative and another parent representative who also was a local church representative, and finally, one with the external university-based planning coordinators. All three interviews were centered around the same seven interview questions. From the interviews five "elephants" stood out in the midst of information and were worthy of note since they give a brief snapshot of some underlying issues going on in the process.

The following are the comprised answers to the interview questions:

1. What did they see as the major issues surrounding strategic planning in the district?

The major issues were centered around politics in the community. Getting the senior citizens, the teachers' union, the African-Americans and parents to "sit down at the table and talk" were the big issues. The senior citizens owned the greatest amount of property and were the largest tax-payer base. They did not want their taxes raised for anything let alone to support the schools. Something that none of those interviewed was willing to discuss in any detail happened within the year and involved the NAACP and the school district. Supposedly, it "hit the newspapers" and the school administration was accused of "underhanded planning." The issue seemed to focus around the administrative action of closing buildings that were in "dreadful shape" and collapsing all the schools of the district into one K-12 complex. The safety of the buildings was an issue and the administration felt it wiser to shore up one building than try to fix them all. It is not uncommon in the small communities around to have one K-12 complex. This decision, however, created a community fuss and a school district morale problem. In addition, the high school suffered most from the decision because the high school no longer had an entire building for its programs.

The relationship between the union and the administration became antagonistic because of this issue as well as an issue surrounding the retention of the external planning team. Many teachers were laid off due to building consolidation. The union then demanded certain audits on the administration. This caused internal friction between the union and the administration.

Strategic planning was an issue with the union because the union leadership was trained by the state teachers' association to facilitate strategic planning. The Superintendent and School Board decided to retain the contract they had with the university-based planning team because they had been helping over several years with long-ranged planning anyway. Complications arose around the composition of the Technical Committee of the strategic planning process because the Technical Committee, by mandate, was suppose to be comprised of professionals from the district, but the teachers wanted to support the union leadership that said it would not be part of the planning committee. In December, only two teachers had shown an interest in belonging. The administration said that they would go on with the process and draw the professionals from the community and administrative representatives if they had to, since they had extended the invitation to the teachers to be part of the process and the invitation was not accepted by December.

Another issue was the financial situation in the district. Since there was very little money supporting

the schools, the interviewees questioned whether or not the district could pay for a process that would set standards that could equal the wealthier districts in the area. They felt that equality issues were prevalent in the process. They wanted to asked the state if it was going to help them pay for all that needed to be done to have a competitive district and they wondered how they could be competitive with other districts if they had no money.

2. What would be the most difficult part of the reform effort for the district to implement and why?

The most difficult part would be trying to get communication going. Trying to get the community to sit down and hear what the reform meant would be a big effort. There were too many negative attitudes towards the schools going on and the polarization among African-Americans, teachers' union, and the elderly made communication difficult. They just would not sit down together and talk.

A new issue was emerging at that time with the presence of an at-large member who had asked the Superintendent if he could join the planning committee. He and his family were new to the community, and he felt this was a way of getting to know the district and what was happening in it. However, he left the meetings early and at one point commented that he had all he needed to know. During a discussion, he brought up values and attitudes. Someone thought that this person might be a "plant" from the Christian right wing that had been a powerful influence at the state level in the whole debate in the reform movement particularly around learning outcomes that were affective in nature. Some members of the committee felt that this might sound like paranoia, but "you learn to be cautious", said one interviewee. In reality, no one really knew this person.

The assessment and measurement of the student learning outcomes were another issue. The district wanted to be competitive with other districts but knew that, even if they chose a portfolio system of assessment, their portfolio would mean something different if a student moved to another district. They wondered to what extent another district would accept the portfolio of their student and again, they asked themselves, "How can we pay for it (meaning a good assessment system)?". They were concerned that a student from their district who might move to a district that had higher standards or a different curriculum might be penalized by the new district's standards. For instance, they noted that under old regulations English I was about the same throughout the state, but under new regulations, English I might not exist in

the same context. Suppose English I was grammar and writing in one district, but literature in another? What would the student do who transferred and found themselves in mid-year of literature when they had just had a half a year of grammar and writing? What would the district do with that student?

3. How did they become involved in this planning process?

All the actors interviewed said they were invited to be on the committee. No one had volunteered on their own. The Strategic Planning Coordinator was asked by the Superintendent to take that position and facilitate the strategic planning effort; the PTA representative was asked to represent the parents by the Superintendent; the parent/church representative had been involved in an educational consortium in the area and a member of the local ministry asked her to represent the church on the committee to ensure that moral issues were being addressed and not ignored; the university-based planning coordinator was asked by the Superintendent and Board to stay with the district when it went from long-ranged planning to a state mandated strategic planning process because the team had been involved with the district through a consortium for several years.

ELEPHANT #1

The parent representing the church had noted that she was chosen by the church to represent it on the committee. However, during the interview she kept speaking as a parent and noting that she had concerns about her own child being educated within the district. Therefore, the questioned posited to her was: **Do you feel you represent a parent group or, as you said, you represent the church?** Her response was that she felt she represented "parent/community". She said she worked with the elderly, a local youth center, and the church. She felt that, "in reality I am not on one group's side, I am on [the side of the school district]!]."

4. What did they feel their roles were in the planning process?

The Strategic Planning Coordinator felt it was his duty to see that everything ran smoothly and the meetings got coordinated.

The two parent representatives felt they held roles as personal parents. The PTA representative had

a child that was considered to be Special Needs and did well with auditory learning. The parent/church representative had a child who rebelled against doing homework and was sometimes considered a "problem child" when, in fact, he was "frustrated". Both parent representatives wanted to see that the best was done for each of their children and they felt that they could do this while being on the committee.

The PTA representative did feel that her role represented every child. Therefore, she wanted to make sure that all their needs were being met.

The university-based planner felt that her role was to support the other planner on her team. Strategic Planning was "his brainstorm". However, when the districts were moving into things that involved teachers such as the "Technical Committees' that would address assessment and planned courses, this was her expertise and this was where she "fit in."

ELEPHANT #2

Both parent representatives seemed to be concerned about many issues in the district. Though they laughed and joked during the interview, there seemed to be an underlying concern that was not being mentioned. An "elephant" questioned posited to them was: **Are you concerned about the process and how that is going and what is being addressed?** Neither said very much but one said that she thought if the children started improving that maybe the parents would come along, too. There was an underlying concern that the parents in the community were not showing much interest in the schools.

ELEPHANT #3

Both parent representatives were eager to talk theory about the fact that parents and community should be working together. They felt that they, themselves, were "happy catalysts." However, it had come out several times in the interviews that the factors in the community just were not working together. The Strategic Planning Coordinator also said this. The parent representatives gave the impression through bantering and light talk that they were reaching their constituents, but I had an idea they were not (my bias). Therefore, the question posited to them was: **How do you bring all those factors together from the PTA and meet all their needs?** One said she was not sure. She indicated that there were "dividing walls all over [the community]." She noted that she did not know how "we're going to bust them."

ELEPHANT #4

There seemed to be a history missing from the conversations, and I felt that history was flashing around some of the comments being made. Furthermore, I felt that the lenses people wore in relation to their "roots" in the community made a difference as to how they responded. I, also, thought this "rootedness" made a difference in what they wanted for the schools during the planning process. So the questions posited to the two parents were: **Did either of you grow up in the community? In a nutshell, can you tell me what it was like before and what is different now between the climate you experienced growing up and the climate you experience now?**

The PTA representative had lived there all her life and the parent/church representative had lived there over ten years. The PTA representative said the climate had "risen and fallen several times and it was now like a ghost town." People used to be "willing to help you if you had a fight somewhere but now they would close their doors, pull down their blinds, and not want to get involved."

Furthermore, they both noted that old businesses were closing up and "moving across the line." This was "scary because these were things you needed to make a community," they said. The parent/church representative felt that she was still considered an outsider and that the "homebred" group did not want "penetration in the town." There was a mentality that when the mill was open that "the blast furnace" ruled the life of the town and that life was better then. She felt that people needed to accept the fact that the mill was gone and that they needed to get on with life. Her feeling was that if the mill took care of so much then why were the schools in such rough shape now?

5. How did they feel their supporting roles were received during the planning process? (This question was not asked of the Strategic Planning Coordinator because he was the one organizing the meetings.)

The parent representatives felt that people were responsive to them. The administration had wanted the community support and the inclusion of the parents. Therefore, they felt welcomed. Since "they" had come in search of "us", as they said, they felt the administration wanted to make sure they felt welcomed on the committee. The parent/church representative felt that she was a "Flower Child" of the 60s and 70s and wanted everyone to "love one another and get along". She felt she represented the children as well as the community, and she hoped the teachers were ready to "buy into all this because it wouldn't work unless they

were committed to it."

The PTA representative said she volunteered at the school so she felt she knew what the schools were about. She felt she spent much time at the elementary building and that the process of the reform should have started at the elementary not the high school. She said she never "understood why the state started with the ninth grade."

The university-based planner felt that, at first, the districts, including this one, see them [the planners] as "outsiders." The teachers and administrators in many districts have had too many experiences with "higher-education-types" that "pull-out of a district when the verbal beatings start." She felt that this planning team had "become legends in our time" and have the reputation of "taking the beatings and sticking with the system." As soon as the districts see how much work they are doing to take extra work off the hands of the people in the district, then the district people are greatful to have them.

The planning team, she felt, gained the trust of the district people when they could see that the team was there to help them. The big difference was that "we don't go away. We keep coming back!" She felt that any objections were more to the intrusion of the reform mandates on the day-to-day running of the district, and, that often, the planning team is seen as changing the life of the district and this intrusion is not always welcomed.

6. Who did they feel played the major role in this whole process and who did they think should?

There were several concerns that they had regarding the major roles in the process. There was a universal feeling that the governor should provide the money to support this effort financially because the district cannot put into effect most of the things they have been working on if they do not have the money to do so. The interviewees also felt that the Superintendent must be "present to the process", but at the time, he was giving the Strategic Planning Coordinator the "reign" to do whatever needed to be done.

All actors felt that the people in the community were not taking responsibility for this reform and not fulfilling their roles. However, it was generally felt that the administration must be responsible for the implementation by seeing that the teachers do their jobs when the mandates were set forth. The administration was also responsible, as they saw it, to see that teachers "had what they needed to teach, were trained properly to do what needed to be done, and had the support to do this."

7. What did they think were the major concerns surrounding the planning process, and what did they think would help with some of these concerns?

There was much violence in the community and also in the schools. The gangs were a big influence in the town. Many individuals had a "lackadaisical attitude and felt it was not their responsibility to deal with the violence." Collectively, they felt that it was rare to hear someone say that the children needed to take responsibility for their own actions. At that time, there was a great deal of pressure placed on the children from peers and the society they were growing up in to do what was wrong. Even though many parents were trying to get their children to do what was right, there was this pressure from outside to do what was wrong.

They felt that teachers were not taking responsibility for their jobs when they did not show up to class or keep control in their classrooms. They felt that the community was not fulfilling its responsibility to the schools when it would not provide the school with what it needed [primarily money] to educate the children. They also felt that parents and children were not taking responsibility in educational matters.

However, it was noted that this strategic planning process was one of the first times that people began to talk about positive things in relation to the schools. They felt with this new attitude, it was time to "sit down and work together" since the teachers and community were all agreeing this should be done.

ELEPHANT #5

The two parent representatives appeared to have "hidden agendas" on which belief statements should be the ones with the major focus for the district. One of them argued for the Special Needs statement and the other argued for the Athletics. Therefore, the "elephant" questioned posited was: **Which belief statement do you think deserves the greatest attention?**

Collectively, they believed that "Curriculum" was the most important one. They argued that if the children were going to be "globally competitive" they had to have the "information" to be competitive. The PTA representative said that, "If you don't have curriculum and back it up then you've got nothing."

They felt that the "Facilities" came next because they needed safe buildings. They argued that when facilities are run down then "pride" in the schools is lost in both the eyes of the students and the community. Finally, they argued for "Athletics". They felt that athletics played a major role in this district especially at the high school. They said that the community "puts it before everything else."

FORMATIVE SUMMARY

There are several actors who play an important role in the implementation of the strategic planning process. The Strategic Planning Coordinator, who is also a Principal in the district, sets the agendas and plans the strategic planning meetings. The Superintendent is very much present at the meeting though does not take a leadership role during the meetings. He leaves that to the university-based planning team and the Strategic Planning Coordinator. However, he often gives closure to discussions and provides informative feedback when necessary. The Business Manager was a strong voice at the meeting in November, but was not present at the December meeting. The university-based planning team is the key actor that runs the meetings and organizes the work during the meetings. The two planners take work back with them and develop documentation driven from the work done at the previous meeting and return with this documentation to the next meeting.

The Strategic Planning Steering Committee began as a small committee during the Winter of 1992 when the "winds of the reform" were just beginning to blow. It looked like the reform would eventually become law so the Superintendent wanted to begin formulating a committee. The district had been involved with long-ranged planning for a few years so many of those involved with this just became part of the Strategic Planning Committee. The committee members met up until February of 1993, at which time, they developed a mission statement and drafted some belief statements. The committee did not resume again until November of 1993. During the Spring and Fall of 1993, there were new members added to the committee either by invitation or response to a posted open invitation to the community to participate that the district placed in a local paper.

The committee came together in November to enrich and develop the belief statements. The committee believed that the mission statement and belief statements would drive the formation of the student learning outcomes. At some point later in time, the Technical Committee which would be a subcommittee of the Strategic Planning Steering Committee would create the student learning outcomes, determine the assessment instruments, and determine staff development programs.

The Steering Committee consists of representatives from the administration, teachers, and community, but there is one "at-large" member who is new to the community and no one knows him. He asked the Superintendent if he could join the committee to get to know the district. Some people involved with the Steering Committee feel he might be a plant from the religious right wing that has been steeped in

controversy over the new reform. Some members of the committee admit that this is paranoia but feel that they have learned to be cautious about these things. He has left the meetings early and given the impression that he has gotten enough information. They think that if he is a "plant" for the right wing that this is a problem that the district "does not need."

The Steering Committee has several embedded community problems on its plate to deal with. There are political issues that rear their heads in the community that influence the schools and ultimately the planning process. The elderly who own most of the property do not want property taxes raised, let alone raise them to support schools. The African-Americans have issues with the community, gangs being one, and schools being another. The NAACP is a strong presence in the community. There is a representative of the NAACP on the Steering Committee. The teachers' union and the administration were in an antagonistic relationship in December. The problem seemed to center around buildings being closed and consolidating them into one K-12 complex. This created a loss of jobs for both administrators and teachers. It has also created a morale problem among the schools. The union demanded audits in the Fall on the administration and this caused friction between the two groups.

Another strain between the administration and the union centers around the use of the university-based planning team. The union leadership was trained by the state teachers' association to lead strategic planning initiatives. The district administration chose to retain the use of the university-based team since the team had been working on long-ranged planning with the school district for approximately three years and was funded by a state grant. The union leadership felt that it should be leading the planning initiative and the district should not be paying for the use of an external group. Consequently, the teachers were backing the union leadership and except for two teachers, they were boycotting joining the planning committee. However, the mandate for the Technical Committee that would develop student learning outcomes and programs related to teaching and learning was to have professionals from the district [teachers and administrators] on that committee. The rationale was that these people would be responsible for the teaching and learning so they should be the ones to design the outcomes and plan curriculum.

In addition, several actors in the planning process feel that unless the community factions can sit down and talk then the reform effort is not going to get communicated to everyone in the community. Everyone needs to work together and this is seen as the single most important element in the process of planning.

More issues facing the Steering Committee centered around the buildings. The buildings were in deplorable condition and in the Fall, as mentioned earlier, several buildings were closed and all classes K-12 were consolidated into one complex. This idea of a K-12 complex is not unique to the area. Several smaller districts in the area have done this over the past few years to consolidate resources and funds. Safety factors were one reason for the buildings closing. The administration came up against an angry community and group of teachers in a major argument during the summer of 1993 over this controversy and by Fall both the community and teachers were angry over the decision. The administration was accused of bad planning.

There is a feeling among some members of the Steering Committee that when a town does not care about its buildings and the buildings reflect ruin this type of attitude influences the community in a negative way. When the mills were alive and the "blast furnace" from the steel mills ran the lives of the community, life was better as far as the "homebred" members of the community felt. However, some members of the planning committee felt that if the mills were so great and provided so much, why were the schools "in ruin" now? The businesses are moving out of the community and "moving over the line." Some members feel that this means ruin to the community as a whole because businesses reflect the community.

Finances are going to be another big issue in the reform effort. Several actors feel that the state should be providing funding especially for assessment. There is a major concern that the district needs to be academically competitive with other districts and it cannot be competitive if there is no money to support any changes. There is a belief that inequity is going to continue. There is also a concern that students who might move to another district will find themselves in jeopardy against standards and curriculum requirements in another district that might not have the same standards and curriculum requirement as this district. The underlying question is: Would a portfolio or the standards that this district sets for their students mean the same in another? What impact will this have on children that move?

The Technical Committee that will be a subcommittee of the Steering Committee will have subcommittees also. Two key ones will be the Organization/Personnel Committee and the Assessment Committee. The Organization/Personnel Committee will have the responsibility to keep the community informed about the strategic planning ideas and the Assessment Committee will have the major responsibility of determining how student learning outcomes will be measured and what instruments to use.

The district is in the first phase to implement the new reform and it must have its strategic plan on the desk of the State Department of Education by September 30, 1994. In addition, the plan must be on

public display in the town for thirty days prior to submission to the State Department. The entering ninth grade of September 1995 will be the first class to be effected by this mandate. Some members of the committee wonder why the state did not start with the elementary and why they only began with ninth grade.

This district appears to be a financially distressed district that has adversarial community and school factions that make the planning process difficult because of antagonistic attitudes and communication problems. The administration is trying to have broad representation on the Steering Committee but the teachers' are boycotting joining because of the union leadership issue of not being the ones to lead the planning process. Teachers are not volunteering to join the Technical Committee that requires professional input especially for things relating to teaching and learning such as assessment and curriculum design.

There seems to be a history of a once proud steel mill town that has not recovered from the closing of the mill. At one time, the mill drove the decision making in the town and controlled people's lives. Now that organization is gone and there is nothing else to draw on except unemployment and low-wage jobs. Pride is being lost in the community and what little pride is left is found in the athletic teams that have won championships.

There are many caring people in the community and some have come forward to be part of the planning process. They feel that the talk of strategic planning in the schools has sparked a united interest in the district, and for once, people are coming together in a spirit to speak of the school district in a positive way. Some members of the Steering Committee believe that this reflects a hope of good things to come. The major concern of all is that the district will be competitive with other districts, but they worry that inequity will continue. As they try to set competitive standards and appropriate assessment, they feel they will not have the funds to do what they would really like to do.

References for the regulations came from:

Regulations of the State Board of Education of Pennsylvania, Chapter 5, Curriculum. From Kimmel, N.M. (Interim Executive Director of State Board of Education). (June 1, 1993). Letter to Interested Citizens. Harrisburg: Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, State Board of Education.